

NOVEMBER 1992

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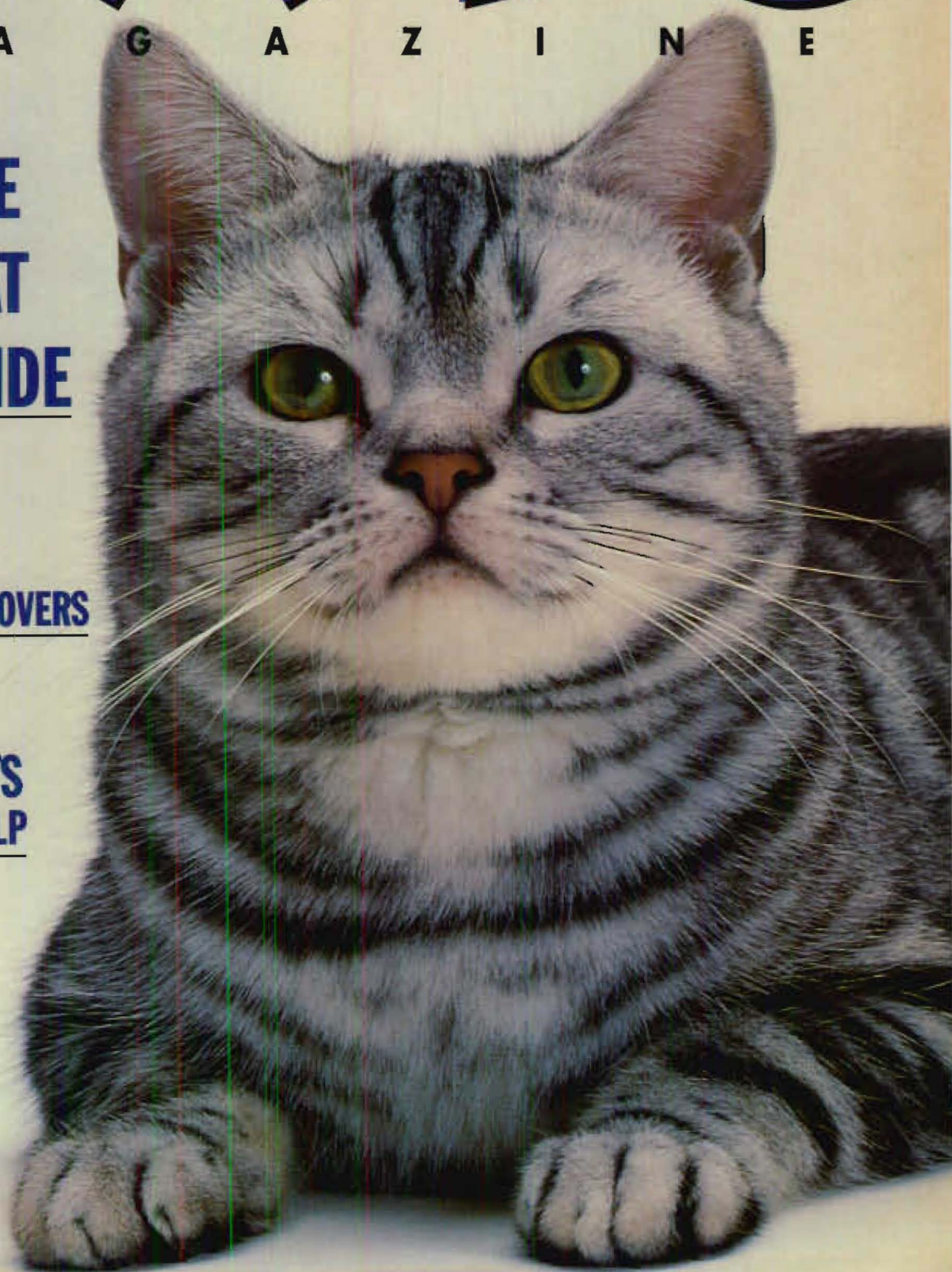
CATS

M A G A Z I N E

COMPLETE HOME CAT CARE GUIDE

**CHRISTMAS
GIFT IDEAS
FOR CATS & CAT LOVERS**

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Tetsu Yamazaki

PURRY-FURRY'S MEHITABEL

**BREEDER: CAROL MELVIN
OWNERS: DAVID & CAROL MELVIN**

BREED OF THE MONTH

BY J. ANNE HELGREN

Facts & Figures

- Recognized for championship competition in TICA, ACFA and CFF. Provisional status in CFA
- New CFA registrations for 1991: 109
- Change from previous year: +25 percent
- Rank in popularity for 1991: 9th among 12 longhaired breeds
27th out of 35 breeds overall

THE AMERICAN CURL

Once upon a time, deep in the woods of Southern California, there lived a cruel woodcutter whose only companion was a cat. One spring his cat gave birth to two strange kittens whose ears curled backwards. "Pah!" cried the woodcutter. "These kittens are deformed!"

Over his cat's pitiful meows of protest, he threw the kittens out into the woods where they wandered, cold and alone, until they came to the doorstep of a woman named Grace Ruga. She took them in and gave them a place by the fire.

As a reward for her good deed, Grace became the famed founder of a new magical breed of cat.

The origin of the American Curl might have gone something like that. OK, so there probably wasn't an evil woodcutter, and there are no deep, dark woods in Southern California. And (as far as we know), the American Curl is not the product of magical transformation, but originated as a spontaneous genetic mutation in the domestic cat population.

However, in June of 1981 two abandoned cats with curled ears really did arrive on Grace Ruga's doorstep as if their destiny had been planned.

One of the cats that showed up on Grace and Joe Ruga's doorstep disappeared soon after arriving. The other, a longhaired black cat, decided to stay for the regular handouts. Grace named the cat "Shulmith," which comes from a Hebrew word meaning "black, but comely."

The Rugas didn't give much thought to the curly ears until Shulmith gave birth in December of 1981. Two of the kittens had curls, indicating that the trait was produced by a dominant gene.

Grace Ruga gave these two kittens to her sister, Esther Brimlow. Nancy

Kiester, a former breeder of Australian shepherds, saw the cats while making a delivery to Brimlow's house and fell in love with their unique ears and gentle temperament. She obtained the two Curl kittens from Brimlow. After reading an article on Scottish Fold cats—a breed also noted for its distinctive ears—it occurred to her that this might be an entirely new breed.

Kiester contacted the Rugas and together they exhibited Shulmith and Kiester's two kittens—Master Luke and Princess Leah—at a show in Palm Springs, California, in October of 1983. Later they met with a judge who bred Scottish Folds. She confirmed that the Curls were a new breed altogether.

While some new cat breeds have had to bang their fuzzy little heads against the cat fancy walls to gain acceptance, the American Curl has purred its way into the hearts of judges and cat lovers alike in an amazingly short period of time. Only three years after their debut in Palm Springs, TICA granted the Curl championship status in their new breed and color classifications. Later the same year, CFF accepted the breed for experimental status and CFA accepted the Curl for registration. In February of 1991, CFA granted the breed provisional status.

Ear-resistible

While finding the perfect Curl might make some think of Santa Cruz and the Beach Boys, cat lovers looking for Curls need go no further than the nearest breeder. According to CFA's standard, the ideal Curl's ears are set on the corners of the head, with the base of the ear firm and the tip soft and flexible. Erect and open, curving in a smooth arc back away from the face, they point toward the center of the base of the skull. The furnishings of the ears (interior hair) are

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Breed of the Month

Continued from page 50

profuse, well extended and preferably tufted.

The degree of curl can vary from 90 to 180 degrees, or from first to the favored *third-degree* curl. The ears should not curl back to touch the head. This is cause for disqualification, as is

any ear lacking firm cartilage from the base to at least one-third of its height.

At birth, Curl kittens look like any other kitten, but between one and seven days, the ears begin to get firmer and start to plump up and curve back. The degree of curl can change dramatically over a short period of time. The curl of the ear usually settles down into the form it will carry throughout the cat's life by the time kittens are 4 to 4½ months old. Curl cats take two to three years to reach maturity.

A medium-sized cat (5-10 pounds), the Curl's body shape is semiforeign and moderately muscled with length 1½ times the height at the shoulder. The hair for both the long and shorthair variety is silky with minimal undercoat. There are no color limitations for the breed; CFA lists 69 possible colors including colorpoint.

York, secretary of the American Curl Cat Club, and an American Curl breeder since 1986, describes the cat as "a medium energy cat, very inquisitive, affectionate without being clingy, and playful right up into old age."

Curls are easily taught to fetch, says Speciale. "Actually," she says with a laugh, "one of my cats taught *me*. He brought the ball and dropped it at my feet. He kept bringing it back until I caught on."

Curls are also noted for their affinity for children. "One time a friend brought over her child who was just learning to play peek-a-boo," says Speciale. "She'd flip up her blanket and think no one could see her. One of my young Curls would sneak up when she had the blanket up, and when she flipped it down he would dash away. Then he'd come creeping back. They played together for half an hour!"

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A Fetching Breed

The Curl has qualities other than the whimsical ears that make it an attractive pet. "They delight in perching on a shoulder, and love to pat and nuzzle their owner's face," Kiester notes in an article published last year. Grace Ruga asserts that Curls are "people cats," without any stereotypical aloofness.

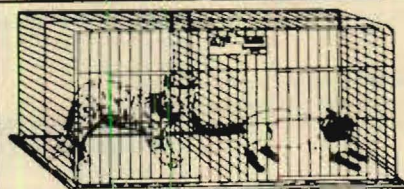
Patricia Speciale, owner of the Mihit Cattery in Syracuse, New

For The Future

Breeders indicate that the Curl line seems to be very healthy and free of genetic defects, a tribute, perhaps, to the benefits of an open gene pool and conscientious breeding. To insure sufficient genetic diversity, outcrossing to non-pedigreed domestic cats will continue until January 1, 2010. This means that the variations possible within the breed are as vast as the Grand Canyon.

"I think that there's some difference of opinion as to what the preferred look should be," says Speciale. "You can fit the standard the way it is written and still have at least two, if not three, different ear looks. You will always see differences of opinion—that's normal in any breed. It's just going to take longer to achieve a unified look."

So remember, if a cat arrives at your doorstep, take it in and feed it. If it doesn't turn out to be a new breed of cat, at least you will have made a new friend. **C**



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